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## PRESS RELEASE

### UNDP and Government of Italy Answer New Emergency for Employment Generation by Revitalizing Old Palestinian Crafts in Bethlehem District

Jerusalem, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003: The Government of Italy and the United Nations Development Programme/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) initiated an emergency programme in the Bethlehem district, worth US\$500,000, with the aim of generating immediate and long term employment through the revitalization of the handicraft industry.

Implemented in partnership with the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce, the Franciscan Terra Santa College and the Silesian Vocational Training School, the project involves the training of artisans to upgrade the quality of their products for potential export and providing raw materials to the handicraft workshops.

Since most of residents of the Bethlehem district rely on income from pilgrims and tourists to the area, the Governorate of Bethlehem has had a long standing tradition of handicrafts, including the carving of olive wood, accessories adorned with mother of pearl, and traditional Palestinian embroidery. However, due to the continues military closures and curfews imposed on the area, restrictions on mobility of local residents, the marked downfall in tourism, and disorganization, this once-flourishing sector began to decline.



In an attempt to counter these challenges of unemployment and decline in the handicraft sector, the project includes four major activities. First, provide short term, and long term training of artisan to upgrade the quality of the olivewood and mother of pearl products. Second, provide emergency quantities of raw materials, tools, and equipment for reactivating production of handicraft workshops. Third, open export markets through participation in exhibitions and trade fairs. Fourth, promote handicraft products through printing of publications, pamphlets and the introduction of a quality seal.

“The Government of Italy has shown its deep commitment to assisting the Palestinian people in these difficult times, especially in the district of Bethlehem, which assumes a special historical significance” said Mr. Timothy Rothermel, Special Representative of the UNDP/PAPP in Jerusalem. “This effort has a double benefit of not only countering the alarming unemployment levels in the district, but also re-invigorating a very important sector.”



Dr. Aloï, Director of the Italian Cooperation in Jerusalem stated that “this emergency contribution aims at revitalizing the handicraft industry in the Bethlehem district as part of a continuous effort by the government and people of Italy to ameliorate the difficult humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territories”.

It is worth noting that this project is in addition to a large joint effort by the Government of Italy and the UNDP, worth US\$5 million, to help in the reconstruction of Bethlehem and to counter the rising tide of unemployment, created since the beginning of the Palestinian uprising two years ago.

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